

2.4.2 Northwest Territories

Historically, the Northwest Territories referred to all of the land west and north of Ontario. As Canada has grown the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta and the territories of the Yukon and Nunavut — along with the northern two thirds of Quebec and much of western and northern Ontario — have been carved out of this region. The territory currently has a total area of over 1,300,000 km² and a population of 42,940 (Statistics Canada, 2009), giving it a population density of three people for every 100 km². The capital of the territory is Yellowknife, with a population of approximately 18,700. The Northwest Territories follow the same curriculum as the Province of Alberta, with some additions to address their distinct language and culture.

K-12 Online Learning

Category	Yes/No	Comments
Territory-led programme	No	
Other online programmes	No	The Northwest Territories utilise distance offerings from the Alberta Distance Learning Centre
Territorial-level policy	Yes	

Online Programmes

The Northwest Territories do not have any of their own K-12 distance education programmes. However, as the territory utilises curriculum from the Province of Alberta, the Government of the Northwest Territories signed a formal agreement in 2004 with the Alberta Distance Learning Centre (ADLC) to provide distance education services within the territory.

In addition to the courses offered by the ADLC, students also have the option to complete an online Northern Studies 10 course offered during the second semester through Aurora College (a local post-secondary institution in the Northwest Territories).

Territorial Policies

While the only reference to distance education in the *Education Act, 2009* is a provision that allows various educational bodies to “authorise, supervise and evaluate the use of distance learning programmes in the provision of the education programme” (p. 72), there are several policy and regulatory documents that outline specific requirements for K-12 distance education.

Funding

The Department of Education, Culture and Employment has historically paid the registration fees for K-12 students enrolled in distance education courses. This removed the financial responsibility from the school, which resulted in the school being less diligent in following up to withdraw students from the course within 60 days if they were not active (as a withdrawal during their period entitled the Department to a refund, minus administrative costs, of their registration fee). Beginning in the 2008-09, the Department has begun to reimburse schools/students upon successful completion of their distance course — which has resulted in the schools being more selective about which students register in the distance offerings.

Governance, Tracking, and Accountability

The *Memorandum of Understanding* (MOU) between the Government of the Northwest Territories and the ADLC is one of the main documents governing K-12 distance education in the territory. The MOU outlines the specific responsibilities, duties and opportunities for both parties. For example, the ADLC is responsible for the administration of students, the learning management system, the course content, the distance teacher, providing access to the various systems to local school officials, and providing professional development to local school personnel related to their method of distance delivery to name a few. The Government of the Northwest Territories is responsible for the payment of student tuition, along with providing local school officials responsible for the distance education students (and a variety of specific tasks). Those involved on the Northwest Territories side also have the opportunity to be involved in course content development.

Section 17 of the *Senior Secondary School Administrators' Handbook*, a policy document of the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, also outlines a series of requirements for distance learning. While the document is primarily descriptive, in terms of the distance learning options available and how to take advantage of them, it does call upon schools to have a dedicated online facilitator to work with the distance education students and outlines the specific responsibilities for that individual.

According to the report *Towards Excellence: A Report on Education in the Northwest Territories*, the Department tracks the completion rates of students enrolled in online courses. In the five school years preceding the report there were a total of 329 enrolments in core courses (i.e., courses other than the orientation course mentioned below). Of those 329 enrolments, 106 or about a third of them passed, 77 or about a quarter of them failed, and 146 or almost 45% withdrew (note that some of the failures should have been withdrawals, as some schools were slow to remove students when the Department was paying the registration fees).

Quality Assurance, Teaching, and Curriculum

Prior to the agreement with the ADLC, the Department required students to complete an *Information Highways 1090* course, which ensured that students acquired the necessary skills to successfully navigate the online learning environment. Since the agreement with ADLC, this course is no longer offered as the ADLC has an orientation module at the beginning of each of their courses.

Presumably the Department's recent policy change to only pay for successful registrations has led to improved figures in the past year. However, the Department indicates that it needs to work with their schools to learn and practice motivational and support strategies for online students in order to foster an environment where online learners can be more successful.